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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the Career Development Center (CDC) at Buffalo State College (New York) successfully collaborated with several academic departments to develop and utilize an outcome based, graduate follow-up survey. To increase response rates to its graduate surveys, the CDC approached three academic departments (social work, engineering technology, and elementary education) and gave the departments the opportunity to include their own questions on the one-page alumni survey. Addition of the department's questions and chairperson's signature to the survey resulted in increased response rates from graduates in social work of 18 percent, in engineering technology of 24 percent, and in elementary education of 31 percent. In the following year the college institutionalized the survey with 30 academic departments participating. Problems are also identified such as more tedious tracking of surveys since all graduates no longer received the same survey. A sample survey using Career Development Center and Department of Social Work questions is attached. (DB)

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TITLE

Successful Collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs with a Graduate Follow-up Survey

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how a Career Development Center (CDC) at a large urban college utilized an outcome based, graduate follow up survey to successfully collaborate with several academic departments. The CDC had been sending a one-page follow up survey to recent graduates but with modest success. To increase response rates, the CDC approached three academic departments (e.g., social work, engineering technology, elementary education) and gave the departments the opportunity to include their own questions on the one-page alumni survey. The opportunity to include survey questions might encourage department participation in the survey, perhaps resulting in increased survey response rates for graduates of the departments (Gardner & Larson, 1993).

The three departments agreed to participate. In the following year the department's questions and chairperson's signature were added to the survey and the response rates for the social work, engineering technology, and elementary education departments increased by 18%, 24%, and 31% respectively. In the following year the college institutionalized the survey and response rates for the college increased from about 20% t0 41%. Other Career Development Centers and academic departments may experience success with similar initiatives that involve alumni surveys.

PROBLEM

It can be vital to the success of career centers to work together with academic departments in order to receive faculty support and referrals for services. However, career centers may find it difficult to bridge the gap that often exists between student affairs and academic affairs in order to work together. Two issues that are currently important in higher education involve accountability and measurement of student outcomes. Career centers may be able to help academic departments with both issues. This paper describes how a career center in a large urban college used a graduate follow-up survey to bridge the gap between student affairs and academic affairs in order to work collaboratively with several academic departments.

METHOD

For over 20 years the Career Development Center (CDC) at Buffalo State College had been sending a one-page follow-up survey to approximately 2500 recent graduates per year to collect follow-up data about their employment & graduate school status, and to measure usage of CDC services. The follow-up survey had return rates sometimes below 20% but the CDC still utilized the results to try to improve service delivery. The results were summarized in a report and occasionally academic departments (often those with national accrediting bodies) requested the survey results for their graduates. These departments tended to use the results in their reaccreditation process. The CDC decided to utilize two methods in an effort to encourage academic departments to participate in the survey and increase survey response rates. First, academic

departments might be more willing to participate in the CDC follow-up survey if they were given the opportunity to include survey questions that addressed student outcomes related to academic major (Gardner & Larson, 1993). Second, making a department name very prominent on the survey (i.e., "name recognition) would show graduates their own academic department had participated in the survey and might result in increased response rates (Gardner & Larson, 1993).

With both ideas in mind, the CDC approached the social work, engineering technology and elementary education departments about piloting an expanded graduate follow-up survey that could include survey questions written by the department. The CDC chose these departments because they had national accrediting bodies and had previously requested results from the CDC graduate follow-up survey. Participating with the CDC on a graduate follow-up survey would give these academic departments a new form of assessment that could yield more than simple 'placement' data, and the results could be utilized in the reaccreditation process. The three departments agreed to participate in the survey.

The CDC graduate follow-up survey had historically been one page in length and double sided (i.e., the front and back of one sheet of paper). Increasing the length of the survey would increase the amount of data collected, but also could decrease the already modest return rate. The CDC believed it was important to limit the survey length to one, double sided page and not risk decreasing the response rate with a longer survey. The CDC questions were

trimmed and re-formatted to fit on the front of the survey, and the three academic departments were each limited to including as many questions as fit on the back of the one page follow-up survey.

The social work and engineering technology departments chose to include closed-ended, outcome-based questions about student knowledge and skills. Figure one includes five sample questions from the approximately 20 questions the social work and engineering technology departments included on their surveys. The fixed response questions utilized a rating scale with response choices ranging from excellent to poor. In addition, the social work department included one open-ended question so students could write comments on the survey. The elementary education department decided to rely solely on "name recognition" to increase the return rates and added no questions to their survey.

Figure 1. Social Work and Engineering Technology Sample Questions

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How well would you say your department prepared you in the following areas?

- Social Work
  - Assessment of individuals and families
  - Performing case management
  - Understanding generalist social work roles
  - Understanding causes and implications of poverty
  - Understanding diverse lifestyles and values

- Engineering Technology
  - Develop skill in using materials, tools, and technology central to a subject
  - Develop ability to work productively with others
  - Develop ability to apply learned principles to new situations
  - Improve ability to organize and use time effectively
  - Learn concepts and theories of major subjects

In its final form, the one page, double-sided follow-up survey included CDC questions on the front and academic department questions on the back. To help maximize "name recognition," the department chairs signed the front of their respective surveys and thanked their graduates for completing it. Initially the CDC handled the mailing, tracking, follow-up mailing, and inputting of data from the CDC questions. The departments paid for the first and second mailings to be sent first-class instead of bulk mail, and handled the input and analysis of their own questions.

RESULTS

Positive

The survey return rates for the social work and engineering technology departments increased by 18% and 24% respectively after the department's questions and chairperson's signature were added (figure two). The return rate for the elementary education department increased 31% although the department only added the chairperson's name to the survey. Return rates for non-participating departments remained the same.

Figure 2. Differences in Survey Return Rates

Academic Department	Survey Return Rate		
	CDC Questions Only	**CDC + Dept. Questions**	Difference
Social Work	34%	52%	+18%
Engineering Technology	22%	46%	+24%
Elementary Education	14%	45%	+31%

The collaboration between the CDC and the social work and engineering technology departments produced a new form of assessment that targeted students in a more effective way, and that yielded a higher return rate than the original CDC follow-up survey. Additionally, the survey results were easily incorporated into the departmental assessment plans for national reaccreditation. The collaboration between the CDC and the elementary education department resulted in a marked increase in survey response rates. The collaboration increased the CDC's visibility in the three academic departments and resulted in an increased number of requests for the CDC to run classroom workshops, presentations, and special programs for the departments. Another benefit was a decrease in CDC expenditures because the academic departments handled the mailing costs. The CDC also gained visibility and credibility on campus with regards to assessment because the CDC had initiated the collaborative effort. Of special note, the CDC director was invited to participate in campus-wide assessment activities that involved academic departments.

The initial collaboration with the three academic departments was so successful that it attracted the attention of the dean of undergraduate education and the campus assessment coordinator. Both academic affairs officers wanted to know how the CDC had raised the survey response rates and persuaded three academic departments to participate in the survey. Consequently, they agreed to promote the CDC initiative college-wide to include all academic departments. A one page template was created that would include survey questions from (a) the CDC, (b) individual academic departments, and (c) academic affairs that

addressed general education. By academic affairs officers' encouraging all academic departments to participate in the survey with the CDC, participation increased from three to 30 academic departments, representing over 50 academic programs. Moreover, overall survey return rates increased from 20% to 41%. The collaboration with academic affairs was so successful that, in the following year, the college institutionalized the survey, utilizing the CDC graduate follow-up survey as a model for the campus. The college also began overseeing the administration and analysis of the survey, and absorbing all related costs of the survey.

Negative

Potential problems must be considered despite the success of the collaboration. Tracking the surveys became tedious and time consuming for the CDC because the same survey could no longer be simply sent to all graduates. The second mailing became particularly challenging to manage because the CDC had to record which surveys were returned in order to insure that graduates received the 'correct' survey on the second mailing. However, computer support eventually simplified tracking the surveys and the mailing labels. Having 30 departments participate in the survey produced positive results, but initially the CDC and academic affairs had to "urge" some departments to finalize their survey questions in order to meet mailing deadlines.

An inherent risk with any measurement of outcomes is the possibility of unflattering results. Also, confidentiality issues must be considered regarding the survey results. Confidentiality was not an issue in the initial collaboration

because the social work and engineering departments analyzed their own data, and the elementary education department collected no data. When the collaboration was institutionalized however, academic departments were assured (and rightly so) that the results were not intended to evaluate faculty or department performance, or for allocating or withholding resources. In general however, academic departments may have felt less threatened by collecting outcome data since the departments created their own survey questions and could add, delete or revise their questions each year.

In summary, the graduate follow-up survey was a creative way to involve academic departments with the CDC. At the most basic of levels, the CDC simply asked several academic departments if they wished to include some questions on the back of a follow-up survey that would be sent to their graduates anyway. Any questions that academic departments added would supplement the placement data the CDC had already been collecting, and if applicable, the results could be used in support of departmental reaccreditation. On the whole, the collaboration was successful and other career centers also may experience success with similar initiatives that involve collaborating with academic departments to measure student outcomes.

REFERENCES

Gardner, P., D, Larson, R., S. (1993). Meeting Institutional Assessment through Outcome Surveys: Challenges in Changing Times. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Association of Institutional Researchers. (Frankenmuth, Michigan, October 8, 1992).

APPENDIX 1

BSC **Buffalo State College**

1300 Elmwood Avenue Buffalo, New York 14222-1095

Dear Graduate:

We at the Career Development Center (CDC) and Department of Social Work are wondering what you've been doing since graduation. Would you let us know by completing and returning the form below? The information will assist future students and will be kept CONFIDENTIAL. Please feel free to contact the CDC for job search assistance. Thank you for completing the survey.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eddie Davis, Associate Professor & Chair
Department of Social Work

Stephanie Zuckerman-Aviles, Director
Career Development Center

Graduate Survey - December 1994, May 1995, August 1995

A. **PRESENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS (check one):**

Employed full time: (1) ____ at job obtained since attending SUCB (2) ____ at job obtained before attending

Employed part time: (3) ____ at job obtained since attending SUCB (4) ____ at job obtained before attending

Unemployed: (5) ____ seeking employment (6) ____ not seeking employment

B. **ANSWER ONLY IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY EMPLOYED:**

Present occupation or job title: _____ Yearly salary _____

Organization for which you work: _____

Address: _____

Street, City, State, Zip: _____

What population group do you now serve?
Aged ____ Children and/or youth ____ Families ____ All age groups ____ Other ____ Not applicable ____

Relationship of present job to area of study at Buffalo State College:
(1) ____ Directly related (2) ____ Somewhat related (3) ____ Not related

C. **ANSWER ONLY IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY ATTENDING GRADUATE SCHOOL:**

(1) ____ Enrolled full-time (2) ____ Enrolled part-time

In what institution/school are you enrolled? _____

Major field of study: _____

MSW ___ MS ___ MA ___ PhD ___ JD ___ MBA ___ Other (specify) _____

- over -

D. **ANSWER REGARDLESS OF YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYMENT/GRADUATE SCHOOL STATUS:**

I have used at least one of the Career Development Center's services: (1) ____ yes (2) ____ no

E. ACADEMIC

How well did the Social Work Department prepare you in these skill areas?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Professional writing skills					
Information and referral/brokerage					
Methods of social action, e.g. petitioning, needs assessment, coalition-building					
Program/practice evaluation					
Assessment of individuals					
Assessment of families					
Group work					
Case management					
Case/client advocacy					
Crisis counseling					
Interviewing					
Termination					

How well did the Social Work Department contribute to your understanding of these areas?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Diverse lifestyles and values					
Issues of human behavior					
Methods of social research					
History of the social work profession					
Generalist social work functions/roles					
Social policy and its implications					
Causes and implications of poverty					

How prepared were you to fulfill the demands of your first social work job since graduating?

Excellent ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Poor ____ Not at all ____ No opinion ____

F. **PLEASE ADD ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR ADVICE THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE CDC, THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT, OR TO UPCOMING GRADUATES.** Remember, the CDC staff is still available to assist you in job searching, applying to graduate school, and any of your other career concerns. Use additional sheet if necessary.